# **Subject line:**

# Intro

Welcome back to SOCHI News! Spring (winter) break is right around the corner, as I’m sure you all have marked in your calendar. Another thing you should have marked in your calendar: our Usability Testing 101 workshop the Tuesday after spring (winter) break. To commemorate the midpoint of winter semester, we’re getting personal–our experiences experimenting with smartphones and AI.

-Reuben Crasto, Steven Liu

# Upcoming Events

We’re excited to host a Usability Testing 101 workshop the Tuesday after spring break. Join us at 5pm to 6:30pm in Room \_\_\_ as we break down the fundamentals of evaluating user experience and learn how to design test scenarios, gather meaningful user feedback, and analyze results to improve digital products!

# Body Sections

**A Week in Grayscale**

In recent issues of SOCHI News, we’ve been talking a lot about smartphones. We talked about how smartphone usage affects societies as a whole and fitness apps and BCTs. But we haven’t discussed the most fundamental aspects of smartphones: **color**.

We are primed to react to color, in some cases with our survival being dependent on it (red = bad, green = good). So what happens when you spend an entire week with your devices set to grayscale? I decided to find out.

Before the experiment, my phone usage was not extremely high anyway (an average of three hours daily is NOT that high in my opinion). I mostly use my phone for messaging, commuting to campus, and an occasional hour-long Philosophy Tube video at the end of the night. And maybe too many Youtube Shorts. Yes, I could be stricter with my phone usage, but who doesn’t feel that way?

After a tearful farewell to color, I went to the accessibility settings and turned grayscale on, and immediately, my phone looked 10x more boring. I noticed that watching videos just did not spark the same joy as before, but yet I was still watching them? I also doom-scrolled from midnight to 2am in grayscale. Was I attached to my phone for its colors, or was it something deeper, like an innate need to consume information?

One of the most surprising takeaways from this experiment was realizing just how much I relied on color. I noticed this when using Google Maps during my commute to campus and work. Google Maps shows a blue route line overlaid on the streets you should take, which works well when you can differentiate the colors; however, in grayscale the route and the actual street are indistinguishable. Glare from the sun, which wasn’t an issue before, also made my screen almost unreadable.

By the end of the week, I realized that grayscale did not change my phone usage. Yes, things looked less fun, but it seemed that regardless of grayscale I needed to use my phone. I was able to adapt regardless of the limitations; maybe stacking limitations (screen time limit, disabling notifications, etc.) could allow me to break free from my phone?

In the end, turning my phone to grayscale wasn’t the magic fix to breaking my digital habits. But it did make me more aware of just how ingrained my phone is in my daily life, color or no color. -SL

**Balancing Engagement and Convenience in AI Design**

Recently, I came across an insightful article on UX Design titled “The Effort Paradox in AI Design.” The piece explores a fascinating concept: while AI systems are often designed to minimize user effort, making things too easy can actually reduce engagement and satisfaction. This paradox, balancing simplicity with meaningful interaction is deeply rooted in AI design and is critical for creating fulfilling user experiences.

The article highlights how effortless AI interactions, such as personalized recommendations on streaming platforms or e-commerce sites, may risk user disengagement. When everything is presented without any input, the experience can become monotonous. There’s a sense of accomplishment in discovering something new after some exploration. Over-automation, while efficient, might rob users of this rewarding feeling.

Reflecting on this, I recalled my own experience with using ChatGPT. It generates entire paragraphs with minimal input, which is definitely impressive. However, I quickly realized I skipped parts of the creative process like brainstorming, rewriting, and refining. The effort I put into crafting content contributed to my satisfaction. This example perfectly aligns with the article’s argument: some level of effort keeps users engaged and connected.

The article also links this effort paradox to trust and privacy. Seamless AI experiences can lead users to overlook how their data is being collected and used. By thoughtfully incorporating friction like clear consent prompts or transparent explanations designers can foster trust.

In summary, the article emphasizes that not all effort is bad. A well-designed AI system embraces thoughtful friction, ensuring users remain engaged, feel secure, and ultimately have more meaningful interactions. This balance between effort and ease is what makes AI experiences truly rewarding.  
-RC

# Game

Test your readers' UX knowledge with a quick True or False poll.

Users always scroll to the bottom of a webpage.

True

False

Use the interactive poll feature

Explanation: Most users don’t scroll all the way down unless they’re given a strong reason to. Eye-tracking studies show that people scan pages in an F-shaped pattern, focusing on the top and left side. To encourage scrolling, designers use visual cues like arrows, progressive disclosure, or sticky navigation.